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PREPARATIONS FOR THE SPECIAL SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY FOR THE PURPOSE OF AN OVERALL REVIEW AND APPRAISAL OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF AGENDA 21

Letter dated 18 February 1997 from the Permanent Representatives of Brazil and Norway to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

We hereby have the honour to submit a letter from Mr. Gustavo Krause Goncalves Sobrinho, Minister of Environment, Water Resource and the Amazon, Brazil, and Mr. Thorbjørn Berntsen, Minister of Environment, Norway, concerning a symposium on sustainable production and consumption patterns held in Brasilia from 25 to 28 November 1996 (see annex).

In the letter the two ministers request the attached document** from the symposium to be distributed to the upcoming session of the Ad Hoc Inter-sessional Working Group of the Commission on Sustainable Development and to the Commission at its fifth session.

(Signed) Celso Luiz Nunes AMORIM
Ambassador
Permanent Representative of Brazil
to the United Nations

(Signed) Hans Jacob BIØRN LIAN
Ambassador
Permanent Representative of Norway
to the United Nations

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* To be issued as E/CN.17/1997/1.

** The conclusions of the Chairperson of the symposium (see appendix) are circulated in the language of submission only.

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Annex

Letter dated 20 December 1996 from the Minister of Environment, Water Resources and the Amazon of Brazil and the Minister of Environment of Norway to the Secretary-General

As the world prepares for the upcoming session of the Commission on Sustainable Development and the special session of the General Assembly, the Governments of Brazil and Norway took the initiative to host and organize a dialogue to identify the key elements for a shared North-South vision on the issue of changing consumption and production patterns. The workshop was held in Brasilia from 15 to 18 November 1996. Participants included representatives from several Latin American countries, Europe, and North America, representing Governments, international organizations, non-governmental organizations, business and industry, the academic community and local authorities.

We are pleased to, hereby, submit to you the results of this meeting as a contribution for the international debate on this issue.

The meeting concluded among other things that:

It is now clear that the Agenda 21, chapter 4, Changing consumption and production patterns, is an issue that has the common interest of and deserves additional international cooperation between industrialized and developing countries.

Exchanging experiences on national policy development and implementation is a determining factor in achieving progress in making patterns of consumption and production more sustainable. The bilateral cooperation between countries such as Norway and Brazil has proven to be instrumental in bringing the debate a step further. It was also recognized and reaffirmed that industrialized countries have a special responsibility in taking the lead. But both developed and developing countries can learn from each other based on respect for each other's cultural diversity.

In the spirit of achieving sustainable development, discussions in Brasilia illustrate that the current debate should have broader scope, going beyond technological and policy change to incorporate the human dimension both in terms of better understanding needs and the values that underpin sustainable livelihoods.

In addition, it is more clear than ever that in view of continuing global environmental degradation and the development needs of developing countries, the United Nations system, in particular the bodies dealing with sustainable development, need strengthening.

We can assure you that the Governments of Norway and Brazil will continue to support and contribute to the work of the United Nations in this regard.

Some of the conclusions of the meeting suggest options for the process and contents for future work and for discussions at the General Assembly special

session. Hereby, we would like to request you to distribute the attached document to the participants of the Inter-sessional Working Group meeting and the fifth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development.

Meanwhile, we look forward to the upcoming deliberations of the Commission on Sustainable Development and the special session in June 1997, and hope that the results of the Brasilia meeting provide a useful input to that process.

(Signed) Gustavo Krause GONCALVES SOBRINHO
Minister of Environment,
Water Resources
and the Amazon, Brazil

(Signed) Thorbjørn BERNTSEN
Minister of Environment,
Norway

APPENDIX

A shared vision - conclusions from the Chairperson of the Brasilia Workshop on Sustainable Production and Consumption Patterns and Policies, held from 25 to 28 November 1996

1. The Brasilia Workshop was organized by the Ministry of Environment, Water Resources and the Amazon-Brazil in collaboration with the Ministry of Environment-Norway. It was chaired by Ms. Aspasia Camargo, Deputy Minister at the Brazilian Environment Ministry, and co-chaired by Mr. Oddmund Graham, Ambassador for the Environment at the Norwegian Environment Ministry. As well as participants from Brazil and Norway, the meeting brought together representatives of Governments from other Latin American countries, including Chile, Cuba, and Paraguay, as well as international institutions such as the Commission on Sustainable Development and the OECD, and representatives of major groups, including the World Business Council for Sustainable Development and the Earth Council. The Brasilia Workshop built on the Agenda 21, chapter 4 - Changing Consumption and Production Patterns and a series of meetings since UNCED. We reached a number of conclusions which could provide input for the review of Agenda 21 in 1997.

2. For the last two centuries, we have been living with the trinity of liberty, equality and fraternity. As we move into the twenty-first century, we need to take as our inspiration the four values of liberty, equality, fraternity and sustainability.

3. We recognize that current production and consumption patterns are causing serious environmental degradation and social marginalization. Most of the world's people are unable to meet their needs and improve their quality of life. If we integrate them into the market economy only using existing mechanisms then we would suffer unbearable environmental stress. Providing the goods and services required to reduce poverty will require lifestyle change among the affluent in North and South.

4. We found that there is a universal interest in a common agenda among all countries to pursue sustainability. The industrialized countries have a special responsibility and are embarking on change and this can have an important demonstration effect for the developing world. But new ways of meeting needs while respecting nature have a special place in developing countries where the urgency to increase consumption is greatest. Action for sustainable production and consumption is not a one-way street, and both North and South can learn from each other.

5. The deep-seated nature of many of the issues requires new forms of international cooperation between Governments and other stakeholders on questions of resource pricing, technology, trade, environmental regulation and management systems. We must make sure that the drive for environmental sustainability does not become an instrument of increasing North-South inequalities. Protectionist measures should not be used in the name of the environment. Rather attention should be focused on opening up opportunities for

developing countries. Furthermore, policies and regulations to change consumption in the industrialized world should be accompanied by dialogue with developing countries and support to ease the transition process.

6. Globalization needs to be underpinned by an ethic of sustainability, based on human rights and the values of freedom, democracy and social equity. It is impossible and makes no sense to change consumption patterns simply through technological change or policy plans. New cultural reference points for success are needed to replace the notion that increasing material consumption equates with progress. Concern for future generations needs to be incorporated into today's decisions.

7. The role of advertising and the media is critical here, and the international community should apply the resources of the media to induce behaviour changes to avoid waste, inefficient resource use and conspicuous consumption. Positive messages of how individuals can live in a sustainable manner are required in place of advertising encouraging ever-rising consumption or stories of environmental disasters. Development models based on overly individual and material consumption should give way to a market economy encouraging lifestyles where spiritual, cultural and community aspirations have a greater role.

8. The Brasilia Workshop focused on the key resources for consumption related to basic human needs, and the main resources for production and the economy in general, namely energy, forests, land and water. At all levels, action to achieve sustainable management of natural resources, and thereby sustainable production and consumption, is needed. We need to respect environmental and resource limits and recognize that fair use of resources will increase human well-being and reduce social conflicts. To achieve this, participation and democratic accountability is crucial.

9. The Workshop discussed a range of positive examples and ideas of success. A broader strategy is now needed for Governments, business and civil society, so that they can carry out their critical tasks and build new partnerships based on trust.

For Governments, the challenge is to change the rules of the game to stimulate social and technological innovation.

- The greening of Government means integrating sustainable development into the heart of government decision-making. It is particularly important to ensure that macroeconomic policies for liberalization and deregulation promote environmental improvement.

- Environmental tax reform can remove distorted prices, stimulate development, encourage employment and reduce pollution and resource use. Environmentally damaging subsidies should be removed in a socially responsible way. Questions of international competition mean that more should be done to coordinate efforts to internalize environmental costs into market prices.

- Governments are also major consumers and can help shape markets through better understanding of their use of goods and services and incorporating environmental criteria into procurement policies.

For business, the goal is to find new ways of satisfying customer requirements with the lowest resource use and environmental costs, and thereby guarantee competitive advantage which will increase as market conditions change to better reflect environmental costs.

- Cleaner production and eco-efficiency offer promising strategies for continued economic development at reduced environmental costs. But eco-efficiency needs to be accompanied by targets and cannot be an alternative to reforming unsustainable lifestyles.

For NGOs, the focus is to:

- develop and present documentation based on the solidarity values found among NGOs worldwide.

- suggest political action at all levels.

- campaign to raise awareness on sustainable "consumer values" and provide tools for changing lifestyles.

- educate citizens in their rights to participation in decision-making on sustainable production and consumption issues.

Finally, citizens need to exercise their consumer rights and responsibilities.

10. Finance, technology and information are powerful levers for achieving change.

- Time is running out for industrialized countries to meet the commitments made at Rio to increase development assistance. But even if these commitments were achieved, additional action would be required to reorient policy frameworks and financial markets to drive sustainable production and consumption. The imagination and skills of the financial sectors need to be mobilized in the cause of sustainable development.

- Banking, insurance and other financial institutions have an essential role in promoting sustainable development since they influence the entire framework in which investment and business activity take place.

- Innovative financial mechanisms should also be explored, such as charges on fuel for international air transport and charges on speculation in international financial flows, to reinforce global funds.

- The organizational dimension is critical to the successful spread of cleaner technologies: "software" is at least as important as

"hardware". Investment should be focused on building the human skills and knowledge which will provide the basis for the generation and adaptation of technology.

- Innovation is important to stimulate more sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources, but needs to be balanced with measures to overcome the tendency towards obsolescence in both products and production technology, which has especially high costs for developing countries. Policy and research efforts should focus on improving product durability and the ability to upgrade technologies.

- Information strategies should focus on raising general "environmental literacy" in government, business and the public at large, and then targeting information at the point of decision.

11. In conclusion, the Brasilia Workshop found that:

- there is a commonality of interests between North and South for achieving sustainable development. Sustainability has humanity at its centre, respecting the world's cultural diversity.

- the scale of the challenge means that institutional reforms are required at the United Nations to strengthen the work on sustainable development and to build UNEP into a robust and effective global environmental organization.

- bilateral initiatives for sustainable development, such as the Brasilia Workshop, offer practical ways of bridging different perspectives of North and South.

12. Political emphasis should be given to this shared vision for sustainable production and consumption in national Government, in regional forums and at international meetings such a Rio plus 5, the fifth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development and the special session of the General Assembly.